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## CASH CROP CULTIVATION AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS OF THE BAKA HUNTER-GATHERERS IN SOUTHEASTERN CAMEROON

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**ABSTRACT** The Baka hunter-gatherers of southeastern Cameroon practice tree cash crop cultivation, which brings economic benefits but is an activity of delayed-return economy that requires long-term and intensive labor inputs. This article describes the socioeconomic contexts of Baka's cacao cultivation and examines how the Baka have adapted to it, with special references to the dynamics of relationships between farmers, merchants, and hunter-gatherers under the pressure of a market economy. In the course of logging operations and expanding cash crop cultivation, the Baka have started to grow cacao in their own plantations. The Baka also gain cash from wage labor for other farmers with larger plantations. Because of a strong desire for alcohol and consumer goods, the majority of the Baka spend the money immediately after acquisition. On the other hand, a small number of the Baka try to save money so they can employ the other Baka to expand their cacao plantations. Cacao cultivation has provided them with direct access to a market economy without mediation and control by neighboring farmers, which gives the Baka autonomy in the local society. As a result, considerable economic inequality has emerged among individuals, causing a conflict between self-interest (economic gain) and existing egalitarian ethics.

**Key Words:** Tree cash crop; Delayed-return economy; Farmer and hunter-gatherer relationships; Egalitarianism; Economic inequality.

### INTRODUCTION

The Baka are a semi-sedentarized and agriculturized population among central Africa's Pygmy hunter-gatherers (Hewlett, 1996). They accepted shifting cultivation in parallel with government-imposed sedentarization in the 1960s (Althabe, 1965), but except for Kitanishi (2003), few studies have described their agricultural activities. In this paper, I will describe the cultivation of cacao as a cash crop among the Baka in a village of Cameroon's Eastern Region, and the associated socioeconomic changes in their lifestyle.

Pygmy hunter-gatherers commonly help neighboring farmers to cultivate food or cash crops in many parts of Congo basin. This has been described as a form of barter exchange in which the hunter-gatherers provide farmers with agricultural labor in exchange for agricultural food, alcohol, metals, and other industrial goods (Turnbull, 1961; Bahuchet & Guillaume, 1982; Terashima, 1986; Sakanashi, 2010). Most of the previous studies (e.g., Ichikawa, 1986; Terashima, 1986; Grinker, 1994; Takeuchi, 2001, but see also Ichikawa, 2000) have described the relationships between farmers and hunter-gatherers as a

closed system that is separate from the wider society, even though these subsistence activities are clearly influenced by the regional market economy. In these studies, neighboring farmers are the ones who mediate and exert controls on hunter-gatherer contacts with the outside world. However, such a closed system cannot be maintained under the high pressure exerted by a growing market economy and the globalization processes behind it. In southeastern Cameroon, both farmers and the Baka hunter-gatherers have been growing cacao in plantations for more than three decades. In this paper, I will clarify the socioeconomic aspects of this cultivation of cash crops in the context of the Baka's relationship with farmers, merchants, and the outside world.

Cash crop cultivation has fundamentally different characteristics from food crop cultivation. First, cash crop cultivation is clearly an act to gain economic benefits (i.e., to earn money). Second, cacao is a perennial tree crop, so its production requires longer and more intensive care, and it repays the output of labor only after 3 to 5 years. It holds, therefore, a typical characteristic of "delayed-return economy," and contrasts with the activities of an "immediate-return economy" such as hunting and gathering, which provides immediate payback (Woodburn, 1982). In this paper, I treat these points<sup>(1)</sup> in the context of the changing relationships between farmers and Pygmy hunter-gatherers.

It seems difficult for the Baka to accept these characteristics of cacao cultivation because they are incompatible with the Baka's traditional lifestyle and value system, which is based on hunting and gathering activities that constitute an immediate-return system. I will, therefore, also focus on how the Baka are trying to cope with the seemingly opposing goals of securing cash income through better adaptation to the modern market economy while maintaining their traditional ethic of an egalitarian and cooperative social life.

## STUDY AREA AND THE BAKA PEOPLE

### I. Ndongo Village: A Multiethnic Society

The research site, Ndongo village, is located on the bank of the Dja River, which is the international border between Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo, and 650 km away from Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon (Fig. 1).

The inhabitants belong to more than 10 ethnic groups<sup>(2)</sup>, but can be classified into three categories according to their lifestyle and ethnic identities: the Baka are hunter-gatherers, the Bakwele (who speak a Bantu language) are farmers, and the Hausa, Bamileke, and Bamoun are merchants. Their populations number around 300, 250, and 50, respectively, for a total population of around 600.

The Bakwele and the Baka have developed pseudo-kinship relationships between certain lineages, and these relationships have survived until today to a greater or lesser extent (Joiris, 2003). The Hausa are Muslim immigrants who came from northern parts of Cameroon and various west African countries. In addition to the Hausa, non-Muslim cacao traders and merchants, including the Bamileke and Bamoun peoples from western parts of Cameroon, are



**Fig. 1.** Location of the study area.

increasingly frequent as cacao cultivation and markets have begun expanding in the region.

## II. Historical Background for Cacao Cultivation in Southeastern Cameroon

Cacao cultivation was first introduced to southeastern Cameroon as a cash crop in the 1920s and 1930s by the French colonial government, after the gathering of wild rubber declined. At that time, the ancestors of the Bakwele and the Baka lived along the Dja River in scattered small settlements. In the early 1960s, they settled at the present village site, following a policy of sedentarization and concentration of settlements by the newly independent Cameroonian government (Oishi, 2010). As a result of this migration, most of the Bakwele abandoned the cacao plantations they had established in the forest. At the newly established village, only a few families created new plantations.

Ngbala and Sembe districts of Sangha province in the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), the region adjacent to the research site, have been the most productive cacao area since the 1960s. The Baka were asked to help the farmers of this region develop their cacao plantations. The major factor limiting production was the scattered distribution of the labor force needed to sustain cacao cultivation (Guillot, 1977). During the 1970s and 1980s, some of the Baka started cacao cultivation independently from the farmer neighbors in the Congo, but most of the region's plantations were abandoned after the collapse of the Congolese state cacao marketing board in the mid-1980s (Guillot, 1977; Köhler, 2005). Although the civil war in the mid-1990s completely devastated

the Congo's cacao economy, cacao fever gradually spread into Cameroon. Experienced and skilled labor and farming techniques were transmitted to the people in the study area because there were marital relationships and frequent population moves across the Dja River.

In the early 1980s, timber exploitation<sup>(3)</sup> began around the study village. The logging company employed many local people<sup>(4)</sup>, which brought the Baka and their farmer neighbors a quantity of money and purchasing power (Kitanishi, 2006). In addition, the logging company brought many strangers into the area as wage laborers. These workers invested their salary in expanding cacao plantations. After the withdrawal of the logging company, the majority of these workers left the area, but some chose to remain to continue cacao cultivation. By that time, many of the Baka had started their own cacao cultivation near their settlements.

### III. Overview of Cacao Cultivation

There are two rainy seasons and two dry seasons in southeastern Cameroon. At the end of the major dry season, which lasts from February to March, plantations are cleared by cutting down and burning the trees to make room for crop fields. Plantations were first established for food crops such as plantain banana, bitter cassava, yautia (cocoyam), and taro. The primary staple food of the Baka of the study area is the plantain banana, supplemented by cassava and yautia (Sato, 2010). Banana does not require much sunshine to grow, and cacao seedlings cannot grow under strong sunshine. People therefore do not cut all the trees when they establish a new plot for a cacao and banana field; some are deliberately left to provide these crops with shade (Carrière, 2003; Shikata, 2007). The planters sow cacao seeds directly on the ground at the same time as they plant banana shoots. Banana grows first and provides shade and protection for cacao seedlings for 2 to 3 years. After 3 to 4 years, the cacao seedlings grow into young trees and start to give their first harvest. Several years after clearing of the plantations, only cacao trees and shade trees remain in the field.

Cacao cultivation requires continuous labor input all year round. The most important activity is frequent weeding, preferably every 2 to 3 months, to prevent the forest vegetation from recovering. Harvesting and post-harvest processing of cacao beans also require hard work, which continues throughout the major rainy season, which lasts from September to November and sometimes to the end of January. Cacao fruit is fermented and the pulp removed, then the beans are dried under the sun for more than 2 months before they can be sold. When the traders come between the end of December and middle of February<sup>(5)</sup>, a cacao market takes place. All the cacao producers sell their cacao to traders at this market, and they use the income to purchase various goods provided by peddlers from larger towns. From the viewpoint of the time lag between labor inputs and a return on this investment, cacao cultivation differs greatly from the cultivation of plantain banana (Kitanishi, 2003), which provides a return within 1 to 2 years, and which does not require the time-consuming work (particularly the intensive weeding of the fields) that is required by cacao cultivation.

## STUDY METHODS

### I. Field Observations and Surveys of Cacao Plantations

Field research was conducted for a total of 4.5 months, divided into four visits between March 2007 and March 2010. First, I counted all cacao plantations in the vicinity of the village with the help of Baka and Bakwele research assistants. We recorded a total of 132 cacao plantations<sup>(6)</sup> near the study village. I then measured the surface area of each plantation using a GPS unit (Map60Csx, Garmin, Olathe, KS, USA). To do so, I walked around each plantation with the GPS, guided by the current owner<sup>(7)</sup> or their closest kin, who knew the boundaries of the plantation. Because several owners were absent, I was only able to measure 117 plantations.

### II. Personal Interviews About Cacao Cultivation

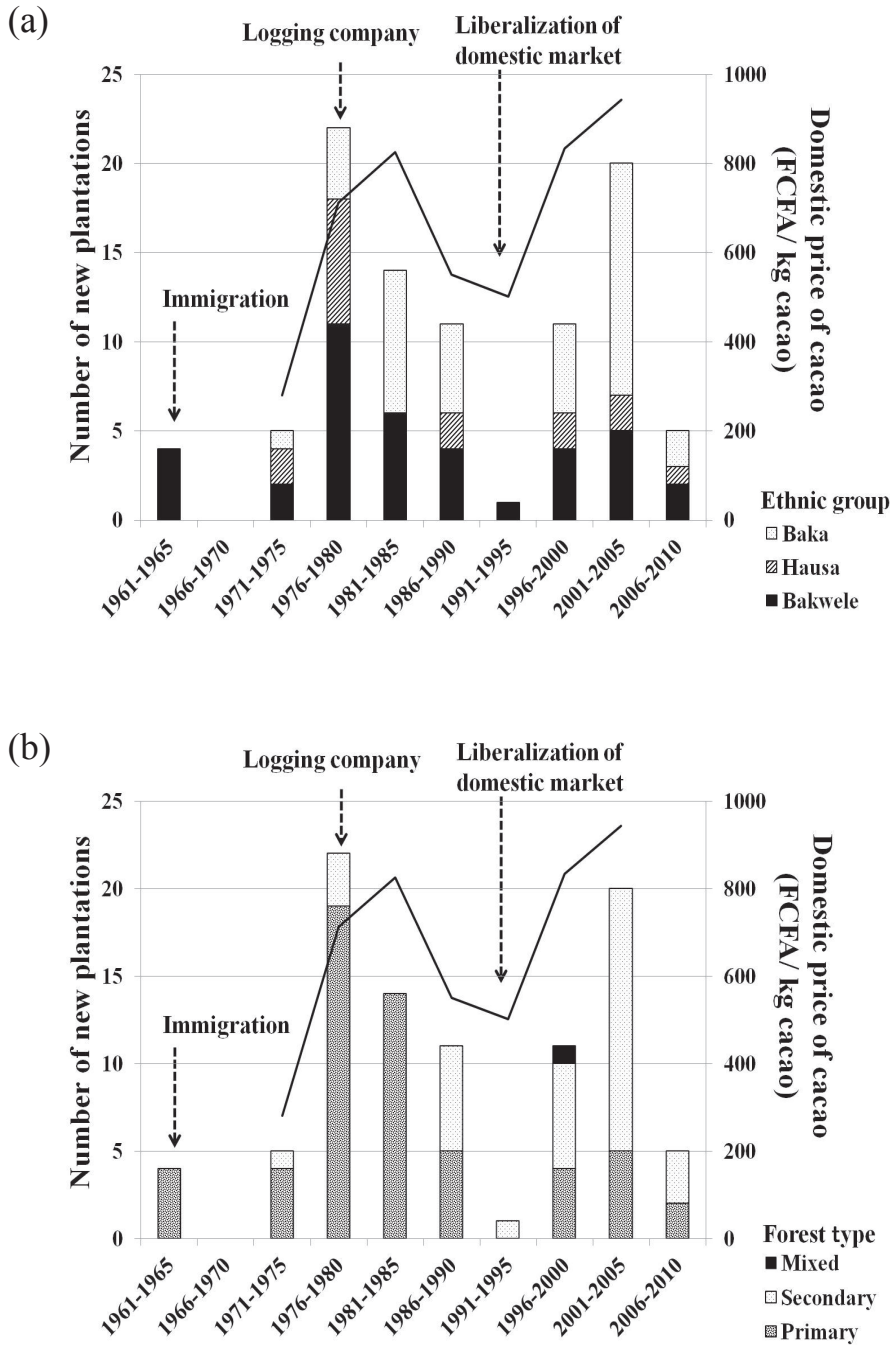
Following the area measurements, I interviewed the current owners individually at their plantations to learn the ownership status of the plantation and its history of development and maintenance, including the original vegetation, the amount of cacao beans harvested for the past several seasons, and any cash income from the plantation. I also asked about how they had spent the earned money. Throughout the research, I used the Baka, Bakwele, and French languages, with Baka translation assisted by a Baka research assistant.

## RESULTS

### I. Demographic Characteristics of the Cacao Plantations

#### (1) Expansion of cacao cultivation in the study area

It was the Bakwele who created several cacao plantations just after their migration into the current location of Ndongo village. Since then, cacao plantations have been increasing, with two peak periods of plantation establishment in the study area. The Hausa and the Baka started to create cacao plantations in the early 1970s (Fig. 2(a)). The first peak period was in the late 1970s, when logging operations were being conducted in the study area. *L'Office National de Commercialisation de Produits de Base* (a national produce marketing board) was abolished in 1991, and the cacao market in Cameroon was liberalized in 1993 (Varlat, 1997). This resulted in a sharp decline in cacao prices (Hakata, 2000; Duguma et al., 2001), despite the economic advantage for exports that resulted from devaluation of the FCFA<sup>(8)</sup> in 1994. The creation of new plantations decreased. The second peak period resulted from rising cacao prices triggered by the decline of production in the Ivory Coast and other west African cacao-producing countries, which suffered from civil wars and other political crises (Shikata, 2007). The Baka increased their number of plantations



**Fig. 2.** The number of new cacao plantations in the study area from 1961 to 2010 (N=93). (a) The plantation numbers by different ethnic groups is shown by bars. (b) The use of different forest types for plantation opening is shown by bars.



in the second peak period whereas the Bakwele and the Hausa established the major part of their plantations in the first peak period (Fig. 2(a)).

The cultivation of cacao in such a remote forest area is strongly affected by the global and regional political and economic contexts. During the first peak period, most of the plantations were created in primary forest, whereas during the second period, plantations were created mostly in secondary fallow vegetation (Fig. 2(b)). Of the total of 101 plantations for which I was able to obtain information about the original vegetation, 59% (60/101) were created in primary forest, 40% (40/101) in secondary forest (fallow land), and 1% (1/101) in a mixture of the two vegetation types.

This shift from primary to secondary fallow forest vegetation reflects the process of sedentarization and population increase in the study area. There were no easily accessible primary forests near the settlements, so residents increasingly used secondary forest.

## (2) Individual differences in the cultivated area

I measured a total of 117 cacao plantations, with 95 owners, which covered a total of 229 ha. As shown by the distribution of plantation ownership in Tables 1 & 2 and Fig. 3, there were considerable differences in the number and size of the plantations owned by individuals, both among the ethnic groups and among the Baka owners.

The Baka owned the largest number of plantations, whereas the Hausa merchants and Bakwele farmers owned larger plantations (Table 2). Only a few Baka owned a plantation of 2 to 3 ha in size. However, almost 90% (58/65) of the Baka households owned one or more plantations (Table 1). All the cacao plantations were established in the same fields used for food crops, and then the fields were converted into cacao fields after harvesting of the food crops. The mean sizes of the cacao plantation owned by the Baka, the Bakwele farmers, and the Hausa merchants were 0.8, 2.9, and 7.6 ha, respectively (Table 2).

I compared the size of the Baka cacao fields with those used to cultivate plantain banana. Data for the banana fields was obtained from Kitanishi (2003), who surveyed from 1999 to 2000 on the same populations that I studied. The variation in cultivated area was significantly larger for the cacao plantations than for the banana fields (Fig. 4).

It is interesting that most of the Baka plantations were similar in size, except for three cases. This is because the Baka rely principally on family members for labor, and 0.8 ha per household may be the upper limit of cacao cultivation without labor input from other families. In contrast, there were much larger differences in plantation size among the Bakwele farmers and merchants, who were able to hire workers (Fig. 3).

The owner of the largest cacao plantation was an old merchant who had settled in the study area in the 1980s. He now owns five plantations, which together cover about 40 ha, from which he produces a gross income of 3.5 to 5 million FCFA per annum according to his own estimates. His plantations account for 17.5% of the total area of cacao plantations near the study village.



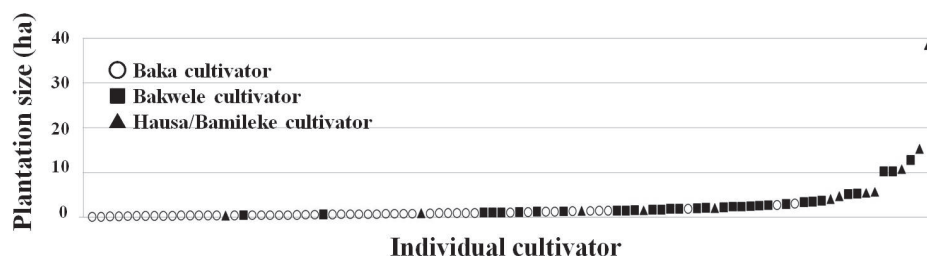
**Table 1.** Cacao plantation ownership by each ethnic group

Ethnic group	Population	Number of households	Number and percentage of households owing cacao plantation
Baka	300	65	58 (89.2%)
Bakwele	250	45	45 (100%)
Hausa / Bamileke	50	14	12 (85.7%)

**Table 2.** Number and size of plantation owned by individual cultivators

Ethnic group	Number of cacao plantation*	Number of plantation per cultivator	Total area of cacao plantation (ha)	Average area of plantation (ha)
Baka	55 (47.0%)	1.1	40.7 (17.8%)	0.8
Bakwele	44 (37.6%)	1.3	96.8 (42.3%)	2.9
Hausa/Bamileke	18 (15.4%)	1.6	91.4 (39.9%)	7.6
Total	117 (100%)		228.9 (100%)	

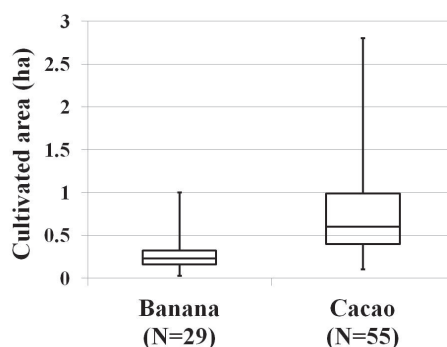
\* Plantations measured in the present study.



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of cacao plantation size per cultivator in 2009–2010. Individual cultivators are ordered from small-scale cultivator to large-scale cultivator. Each point shows an individual cultivator. Cultivators of different ethnic groups are marked with different markers.

### (3) Plantation ownership, inheritance, and gender

I observed a strong sexual bias in the ownership of cacao plantations among the Baka and the Bakwele<sup>(9)</sup>. Cacao plantation owners are almost exclusively men: 93.1% (54/58) of the Baka owners and 90.9% (41/45) of the Bakwele owners were men. Women owned cacao plantations only in specific cases, such as when they inherited the plantation from their husband or when their children gave them part of a plantation as a gift. The cacao plantations were also principally managed by men. This contrasts strongly with the food crop plantations, which were usually owned and managed by the women in both ethnic groups. This is reflected in the names given to the fields for cacao and food crops among the Baka: *gbie na mokose* (field of men) for cacao plantations and *gbie na wose* (field of women) for food crop fields (Hayashi, 2000).



**Fig. 4.** Comparison of the size of the cacao plantations and banana fields owned by Baka households. Horizontal lines represent the median values, the tops and bottoms of the boxes represent the 25th and 75th percentiles (respectively), and the error bars represent the range from the maximum to the minimum value. Data for the banana fields was obtained from Kitanishi (2003).

**Table 3.** Relationship of inheritors to the former owners of a cacao plantation

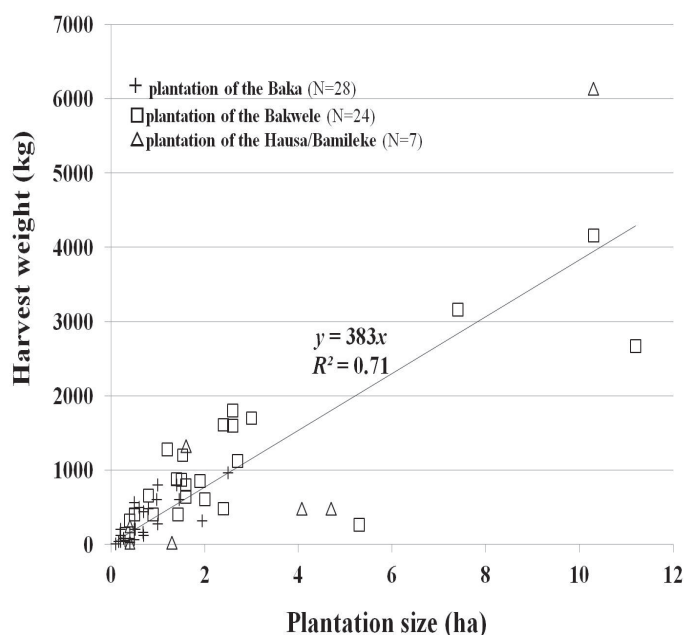
Direction of inheritance	Number of cases
Father to son	11
Husband to wife	3
Brother to brother	3
Wife to husband	1
Father to stepson	1
Sister-in-law to Brother-in-law	1
Total	20

The inheritance of cacao plantations over two or three generations was common among the Baka. Nearly 40% (20 cases out of 55) of the Baka plantations were inherited by family members. Most of the cases were plantations that passed from a father to his son, with inheritance between spouses or between siblings representing the next-most-common patterns (Table 3). Most of the Baka plantations (7 out of 10) larger than 1 ha were inherited within a family. This suggests that the cacao plantations are becoming a fixed property that can be accumulated by means of transmission between the generations.

## II. Earning and Consumption of Cash Income

### (1) Harvest, sales, and estimation of potential income

The Baka can obtain cash income both from their own cacao plantations and from wages earned working for other people. First, I tried to estimate the gross cash income from their own plantations. Here I assumed that the data of dried cacao harvest from plantations of different ethnic groups statistically belong to



**Fig. 5.** Dry cacao harvest as a function of plantation size (N=59). Data obtained from plantations of different ethnic groups are marked with different markers.

**Table 4.** Estimate of potential gross income per cacao cultivator

Ethnic group	Potential income (FCFA)
Baka	367,680
Bakwele	1,332,840
Hausa / Bamileke	3,492,960

Potential incomes are estimated assuming that all the cacao beans are sold at 1,200 FCFA (final producer price at the 2009–2010 season). As mentioned in the text, this is not the case in particular for the Baka, who do not wait until the price of cacao beans increases to the highest level.

a same population<sup>(10)</sup>. Under this assumption, the harvest of dried cacao was proportional to the size of the plantation ( $r^2 = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $N = 59$ ), regardless of the age of the productive cacao trees (Fig. 5). The average cacao harvest was 383 kg/ha. In the 2009–2010 cacao market season, the final price of cacao in the study area was 1,200 FCFA (1.83 euros) per kg dry weight. From this price, the potential gross income would be 459,600 FCFA (700.6 euros) per hectare. For the Baka who sell cacao from their own plantations, they would earn more than 367,680 FCFA (560.5 euros) on average (Table 4).

In reality, however, few of the Baka earn this much money. Though the



**Fig. 6.** Cacao bag and the *carapace* (circled by a broken line) used to measure the cacao.

price of cacao increases towards the end of the harvest season, many Baka cannot wait this long. Instead, they sell a small quantity of their cacao many times during the year. This is because they are more interested in immediately acquiring money than in waiting until they accumulate enough cacao to obtain a better price. Cacao buyers and local merchants understand this mentality well, and visit Baka settlements daily to collect small amounts of cacao throughout the harvest season.

This type of sale in small quantities is called *carapace*, which derives from the name of the container used to measure the volume of cacao beans (about 20 L; Fig. 6). The producer price in this type of transaction is usually less than half or one-third of that in normal sale. In this way, the purchase price for Baka cacao is kept low, and the desire for a steady flow of money discourages them from storing a larger amount of cacao for sale at a much better price at a later date. In addition, both the Baka and the Bakwele often sell small quantities of undried cacao beans to earn a small amount of money. Undried cacao beans are sold at an even lower price.

## (2) Sharing and use of cash income from cacao cultivation

Systematic observation of how the Baka use their cash income is difficult, because it is often hidden from view. To learn more about this aspect of their behavior, I obtained details for two individuals based on interviews.

*Individual A:*

A is a man about 28 years old from a distant village. In the 2009–2010 season, he worked on a Hausa man's plantation and also harvested his own young cacao plantation. The Hausa man paid him a total of 150,000 FCFA for his work. In addition, he harvested 10 L of dry cacao from his own plantation. He sold it by the *carapace* and earned an additional 5,000 FCFA. His total income from cacao therefore amounted to 155,000 FCFA. He purchased consumer goods for 113,150 FCFA (73%), obtained 15,000 FCFA of liquor on credit (10%), and gave 7,000 FCFA (5%) to his mother and sister, who live in the next village. Individual A came to the study area from Ngato-Nouveau, 250 km north of the study area. Though all of his family except his mother and sister lives there, he did not send them money. He spent most of his income on consumer goods, such as a radio and cassette recorder, textiles, a suitcase, clothes, a machete, shoes, and perfume, mostly for himself and his wife. He eventually paid the Bakwele women for the local liquor he obtained from them on credit. However, he remained in debt because he didn't pay back all of his debts and obtained an additional 9,000 FCFA of alcohol on credit soon after repaying the initial amount.

*Individual B:*

B is a young Baka man about 18 years old. After his father's death in 2007, he inherited his father's two cacao plantations, which cover a total of about 0.4 ha. He maintains these plantations with the help of his uncle. In the 2009–2010 season, he harvested 1.5 bags of cacao, which he sold for 40,000 FCFA. He gave 15,000 FCFA to the uncle who had helped him, and 5,000 FCFA to each of his three siblings (a younger brother and two sisters). He retained the remaining 10,000 FCFA. His uncle shared his 15,000 FCFA with his wife and with B's mother (his sister), and B shared his 10,000 FCFA with his wife. The people who received a share of the cash earned from B's plantation had all worked on the plantation. The uncle insists that the plantation is not only for B but also for him and "everyone in the family" who had supported B and B's father to prepare and maintain the cacao fields. As B is not used to working on a cacao plantation, his uncle actually controls the plantation management.

These two examples suggest that direct sharing of the cash earned from cacao cultivation is limited to people living nearby, whether the income is from the sale of one's own cacao or from wages earned for plantation labor. This contrasts strongly with the Baka's customary sharing of food. Especially, the sharing of meat that occurs in hunting camps, where hunters distribute the hunted meats equally among all participants of the camps (Bahuchet, 1990; Kitanishi, 2000; Hayashi, 2008). Money is not the subject of mutual sharing, unlike food. When the Baka receive a payment, most use the cash immediately. They do not depend on money to buy food, because they can obtain food from their own fields. Their major use of the money seems to be for consumer goods and alcoholic drinks (Köhler, 2005; Kitanishi, 2006).

As the case of A shows, the Baka enjoy shopping for a variety of consumer

goods with their money. They do not widely share the consumer goods that they purchase. In particular, they use the high-priced articles such as radio-cassette players that they purchase for themselves. They frequently purchase alcoholic drinks from farmers. Local alcohol is distilled by Bakwele women and is called *ngolongolo* or *arki* by the local people, and it has been an item of barter exchange between the Baka and the Bakwele for decades. However, it has now become commodity for sale<sup>(11)</sup>. In addition to the locally distilled alcohol, non-Muslim merchants, such as the Bamileke and the Bamoun, sell factory-produced alcohol from cities, including bottled beer, red wine in cartons, and small plastic bags of whisky<sup>(12)</sup>. The Baka, both men and women, have a strong desire for alcohol. As soon as they notice that someone in their family or their neighbors has earned cash income, they expect the person to buy them a drink. Thus, alcohol is, contrary to most other consumer goods, thought to be shared widely among the community. Some young Baka, however, do not want to lose their cash because of this alcohol sharing and complain about this practice. It is interesting that the Baka utilize most of their cash income for luxuries (or consumer goods that are not always necessary for their life) soon after they earn it. Baka use cash in the merchant's store to obtain consumer goods and in the farmer's house to obtain alcohol, i.e. from those who have paid for their work. This means that the earned money returns quickly to its origin (Bahuchet & Guillaume, 1982; Köhler, 2005).

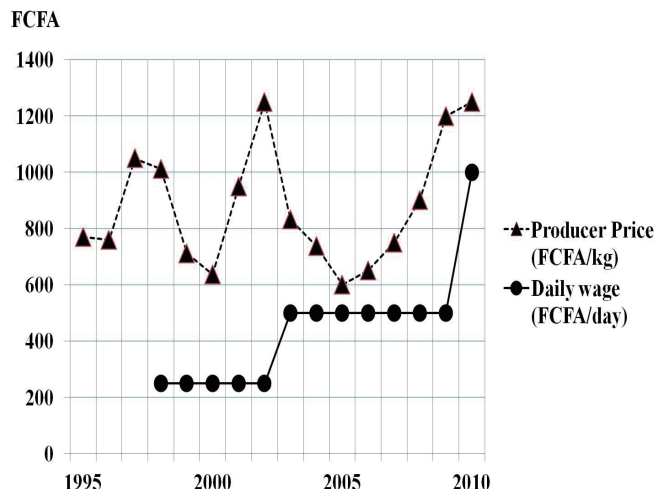
Kitanishi (2006) noted that the Baka distinguish between small amounts of cash (less than 1,000 FCFA) and large amounts (more than 10,000 FCFA); the former is used to purchase alcohol and daily necessities, and the latter is used for bridewealth given to the wife's family. He argued that the significance of this cash accumulation for paying bridewealth is that it may level the economic inequality between households through its circulation. However, the effect of this leveling power seems limited or very small, because there are considerable differences among Baka adult males in their attitudes to whether they accumulate cash for bridewealth or not under the abundant influx of cash from cacao cultivation.

### III. Wage Labor by the Baka

#### (1) Labor shortage and competition for Baka workers

At the end of the dry season, new plantations are cleared, and cacao is harvested in the rainy season. Both activities require intensive labor. Bakwele farmers and the Hausa try to recruit the Baka for this plantation work. There is high competition for Baka workers among these peoples. The daily agricultural work in a farmer's plantation is called *bela*<sup>(13)</sup> in the Baka language. As the price of cacao increased, cacao cultivation expanded in the study area. The resulting shortage of workers increased the Baka wage<sup>(14)</sup> by 400% from 1998 to 2010, from 250 to 1,000 FCFA per day (Fig. 7).

In 2009, the Baka received either 500 FCFA or 0.5 L of local distilled alcoholic drink for about half a day's work. As many Bakwele had no cash to pay the Baka, they instead gave the Baka workers local alcohol in exchange



**Fig. 7.** Fluctuation in the producer price of cacao and in the daily wage for Baka workers in the study area.

for their labor in the cacao plantations. Most of the Baka, however, now prefer to be paid in cash. As more of the Baka work on the Hausa's plantations, it has become more difficult for the Bakwele to find Baka who will work in their plantations. Therefore, the Bakwele visit the Baka settlements every morning with a big container of alcohol to ask for help (Fig. 8). Some of the Baka hate these early morning visits by the Bakwele, and even move their camps far from the Bakwele villages to avoid the visits. The other Baka are, however, so thirsty for alcohol that they may not refuse, saying that "*ngolongolo* is an energy source. We can't stop drinking it."

Contrary to the Bakwele, the Hausa usually pay the Baka in cash and, in addition, also give the Baka gifts of consumer goods such as clothes, sandals, cooking pots, soap, oil, and artificial seasonings. They often provide the Baka with machetes for their plantation work. These gifts strongly attract the Baka, who prefer Hausa plantations for their work. Cash payments can be made several times per season or once at the end of the cacao season, depending on the agreement negotiated between the Hausa owner and the Baka worker. Neither the Bakwele nor the Hausa use Baka children for plantation work.

Interestingly, the Baka who are working on Hausa plantations prefer to pay the Bakwele farmers for local alcohol with the cash they earn, to paying for industrial goods sold at the merchants. Local alcohol therefore plays a role in sustaining the Baka's motivation for doing plantation work, and the Bakwele farmers also benefit from employment of the Baka by the Hausa. In this way, the money circulates among different inhabitants of the study area.

## (2) Reputation of Baka workers

The largest employer of the Baka is the largest plantation owner, who





**Fig. 8.** A young Bakwele couple recruiting Baka workers for plantation work using alcohol (Photograph by T. Oishi; March, 2010).

is called the “economic father”<sup>(15)</sup> of the village. He employs more than 50 Baka workers on his cacao plantation. He employs only Baka for this work, and retains skilled Baka workers for 3 to 4 months by contract, paying some 100,000 to 150,000 FCFA for this period. He does not employ Bakwele farmers because he believes that they complain about their low wages, and do not work as seriously as the Baka. He recognizes that his success is based on relationships of trust with his Baka workers. His success has attracted many other merchants to the area, and they have begun to follow his approach.

The Baka in this region are widely recognized as skilled workers for cacao plantations. For example, several Baka adolescents were once recruited for work in a large cacao plantation near Yokadouma, the capital of the Department of Boumba and Ngoko, about 300 km north of the study area. Although there are many of the Baka living around Yokadouma, plantation owners prefer skilled laborers from the study area. Young Baka men are recruited<sup>(16)</sup> in the study area, transported to remote cacao plantations, and spend 2 to 4 months working there.

In southern and southeastern Cameroon, cacao cultivation plays a big role in the local monetary economy. However, southeastern Cameroon has many disadvantages for commercial cacao farming due to its distance from the port

of Douala, where cacao beans are exported. In addition, the small plantations are loosely managed, and there is limited availability of pesticides and fertilizer. Nevertheless, cacao cultivation seems to have been successful because of the supply of cheap Baka labor.

### (3) Impacts of wage labor

The Baka now find difficulty in balancing wage labor for other people with the work required to maintain their subsistence lifestyle. Shifting cultivation for subsistence has been a communal practice among the Baka for several decades. Wage labor for other people made difficult to practice communal work among the Baka. The Baka were used to form co-working groups of a similar age to perform agricultural work either for subsistence or for cash crops, and cooperate without cash or other rewards<sup>(17)</sup>. But when group members are employed by other people, they would no longer work together with members who have supported them in the past. Some Baka men even abandon their own plantations and go to work for Bakwele farmers or merchants on their plantations for earning money. Thus, the mutual aid system that once functioned for food crop cultivation before the expansion of cacao plantations has weakened, except for the labor service that is provided as part of a marriage payment.

Kitanishi (2006) suggested that employment of the Baka by the Baka for cash or alcohol was unlikely to take strong hold among the Baka, because the receivers of the reward do not necessarily regard it as a return for their labor, but regard it as part of mutual sharing. However, wage labor is not limited to contracts between the Baka and the farmers or merchants. A few of the Baka have begun to employ other Baka in exchange for marijuana, tobacco, alcohol, and even for cash. One Baka man told me that labor is labor, and that there is no difference between plantation work in a farmer's field and work in another Baka's field.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### I. Adaptation to the Delayed-return Economy

Following the sedentarization that occurred in 1960s, some of the Baka started to cultivate food crops, and this was soon followed by cacao cultivation. The similar agroecological characteristics of cacao and banana (i.e., they both need a forest canopy as shade) made it easier to accept cacao cultivation as a continuation of food crop cultivation. Global and national economic policies also promoted this process. The expansion of logging operations in the study area increased access to a market economy and brought money and merchants into the area. External impacts such as higher cacao price are accelerating the expansion of cash crop cultivation. As cacao cultivation expands, fallow land is cleared and used for cacao plantations. The Baka and neighboring farmers have inevitably been affected by these waves of change.

Cultivation of tree cash crops such as cacao requires long-term, continuous,

and often intensive labor input. It is an activity of typical delayed-return economy, and contrasts strongly with those of immediate-return economy (Woodburn, 1982) that the Baka and other Pygmy hunter-gatherers have traditionally used. Most of the Baka households have started to grow cacao in their own plantations, even though the plantations are much smaller than those of farmers. Some of the Baka also have large plantations. In addition, some cacao plantations larger than 1 ha are inherited within a family over several generations. In these ways, some of the Baka have successfully adapted to cacao cultivation. The cacao plantations now comprise their property.

The cacao plantations are usually much larger than food crop fields. Contrary to the practice in food crop fields, which are owned and managed by women, most cacao plantations are owned and managed by men. Most of the inheritance follows the male line. These characteristics have also influenced gender relations within the Baka community by increasing the men's power over the women. I will discuss on this issue in a subsequent study.

My measurements of the size of cacao plantations revealed considerable differences among individuals. The Baka themselves admit that such differences will result in differences in cash income, and thus, in increased economic inequality, which were not found in previous days.

## II. Perception of Economic Rewards and Their Immediate Consumption

The shortage of labor for cacao cultivation has increased opportunities for the Baka to work for wages. The immigrants to the study area have therefore provided the Baka with an opportunity to increase their economic and psychological independence from the Bakwele, who formerly exerted considerable control over the Baka. The Baka now have access to cash income by performing wage labor as well by selling the products of their own cacao plantations.

However, many Baka consume the cash income immediately after acquiring it to purchase alcohol and other consumer goods. The sharing that traditionally prevailed in their society has now been limited to relatives living close to the worker, particularly when the sharing concerns earned money. Their strong desire for alcohol and consumer goods pushes them to immediate consumption of earned money. Such behavior is based on their attitude toward life, which is oriented to the present (Ichikawa, 2000; Kitanishi, 2006). This is a typical characteristic of the people who have grown accustomed to the resource use of an immediate-return system (Woodburn, 1982).

Some of the Baka now face problems with alcoholism (Köhler, 2005). To obtain alcoholic drinks, they are becoming increasingly dependent on a cash economy, and consume alcohol rather than utilizing the money they earn as an opportunity to improve their life, or to invest on expanding their plantations. Even when they spend all their money on alcohol, they do not seem to regret this. Thus, many Baka do not want their own plantations, since they cannot get cash immediately as a result of their work. Instead, they are willing to work for farmers and merchants who pay them wages. Communal co-working in the food

crop fields and cacao plantations of members of their group no longer happens frequently. They are motivated by short-term benefits, and particularly by getting wages with which they can drink and spend joyful moments with other Baka. The traditional habit of immediate consumption seems to prevent most of the Baka from saving their money to attain long-term goals.

The Baka could expect a large amount of cash income from their own cacao plantations if they were willing to keep their harvest until the date of the cacao market, when prices are much higher. Unfortunately, many of the Baka cannot wait until the cacao price increases, and instead sell their cacao little by little to earn small amounts of money that are only sufficient to satisfy their need for basic necessities and alcohol. In this way, they lose the opportunity to earn more cash from their plantations or save it for future use.

The factors that are pushing the Baka toward the cultivation of cash crops seem paradoxical. They are driven by their strong interest in cash for immediate consumption to purchase alcoholic drinks and various other consumer goods provided by farmers and merchants. Most of the Baka will not accumulate wealth by saving the money they earn from cacao cultivation for future use or investment, but instead pursue the immediate reward from using their money.

### III. Changing Values and Interethnic Relationships with Neighboring Farmers

Despite these problems, a few of the Baka try to accumulate money. They may have gradually understood and begun to utilize the new opportunities that money provides. Money has general purchasing power, and by saving it, they can later purchase whatever they want. Although the majority continue to spend their money immediately, some have begun to save it for future use and for investments. The monetary economy in the study area is thereby creating enormous economic inequalities, even within an ethnic group such as the Baka.

On the other hand, the new opportunities provided by money may increase equality among the people involved in cash transactions, since cash transactions assume an equal relationship in the exchange (the money value remains the same), regardless of ethnicity or occupation of its owner. The narratives I heard from the Baka reveal their strong desire to occupy an equal social status with their neighboring farmers and merchants. With increasing chances to achieve economic success, the Baka now have an opportunity to develop greater sociopolitical autonomy in the local contexts.

The increased importance of Baka labor for cacao cultivation has changed relationships among the area's ethnic groups. The Baka have come to recognize the value of their labor for owners of the larger cacao plantations. As long as the current labor shortage continues, the Baka can choose where to work, and have the power to negotiate their conditions of employment. The Baka do not want to be forced to work in the Bakwele plantations, because they see more benefits from working for cash in the plantations of the Hausa and newly arrived merchants. Although the Baka attitude towards the Bakwele has changed drastically, the Bakwele have not accepted this change and still regard the Baka as their "clients" and subject to their control. The Baka want to be

more independent from the Bakwele and establish more equal relationships with them. There is, therefore, a growing discrepancy between these groups in their perception of the degree of interdependence on each other, which often results in conflicts. On the other hand, the Baka regard the Hausa merchants as new “patrons” who treat them better than the Bakwele. The Hausa, however, regard the Baka only as wage laborers and are unwilling to try to control a Baka’s life beyond the terms of their labor contract.

Although money is acting as ‘the radical leveler’ (Marx, 1961; cited in Köhler, 2005; Bloch & Parry, 1989) between the Baka and the Bakwele, it is also differentiating the Baka who are adaptable to monetary economy from those who are not. Through the introduction of cacao cultivation, a few Baka have already realized the potential of the monetary economy for investment, and have learned to save money so they can employ other Baka to work on their own plantations. The difference between the Baka who still focus on the activities of immediate-return economy and those who have ventured into the activities of a delayed-return economy by saving money for future investment has created strong contrasts within the Baka community. This may pose a problem for maintaining peaceful egalitarian social relationships in the future. The considerable difference in their attitudes toward money storing or consumption creates a challenge for how such different types of people can coexist. Contemporary Baka people have to face this problem.

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## NOTES

- (1) If perennial tree crop plantations continue, the crop fields will not return to forests, unlike in the case of the slash-and-burn production of food crops that was practiced traditionally. The lands no longer rotate from crop fields to forests, or vice versa. This may bring about a fundamental change in how local peoples think about land use and their rights to the land. The ecological and sociological consequences of this change deserve further investigation.
- (2) These groups include people of the Baka, the Bakwele, the Djem, the Bangando, the Konabembe, the Hausa, the Fulbe, the Kotoko, and the Bamileke, as well as people from west African countries such as Mali, Senegal, and Liberia.
- (3) The name of logging company is *Compagnie Camerounais des Grumes et Sciages* (Cameroonian company of timbers and lumbers), which operated during the late 1970s and the early 1980s.



- (4) Kitanishi (2006) and Hattori (2010) described the unequal and discriminatory aspects of employment by the logging company. However, my interviews suggest that this was not discrimination but rather based on differences in individual ability. Office work and the operation of machines require literacy and experience, which most Baka adults lack. Wages varied according the sort of job. In the beginning, recruitment of Baka workers could have been mediated and controlled by the neighboring farmers (Hattori, 2010), but as the logging operations continued, some skilled Baka individuals emerged and were appointed to more responsible positions.
- (5) The price of cacao usually increases later in the harvest season. There is, therefore, maneuvering by farmers to increase sales to the cacao buyers during the period of high prices.
- (6) Here, I defined a cacao plantation as any plantation that contained cacao trees more than 5 years old, which can produce cacao fruit, even if it is only a small harvest.
- (7) Ownership of a plantation belongs to specific individuals. However, the concept of ownership is not as exclusive as it is in modern Western societies. In the research procedure, I tried to confirm ownership of the plantation with the people concerned.
- (8) FCFA is an abbreviation for *Franç de la Coopération Financière en Afrique centrale* (Franc of the Financial Cooperation in central Africa), an African currency guaranteed by the French treasury. The exchange rate is fixed at 656 FCFA per 1 euro.
- (9) For the merchants, most Hausa men from northern Cameroon do not migrate with their wives and children. There are few Hausa women living in the study area and the three married Hausa women owned no cacao plantations.
- (10) The cacao harvest data which I use here, as I also mentioned at the section of study methods, is not obtained by actual measurements, but by personal interviews on their sales in the past 3 to 5 years from each cultivator. The accurate comparison of the productivity of cacao plantations belonging to different ethnic groups requires further investigation.
- (11) The price of local alcohol is 1,000 to 2,000 FCFA per litre during the research period. Alcohol strength is 16–43% alcohol content by volume (Oishi & Hayashi, unpublished data).
- (12) The prices of these alcoholic drinks in the study area were 1,000 to 1,200 FCFA per beer bottle (0.65 L of 5% alcohol content by volume), 2,000 to 2,500 FCFA per wine carton (1 L of 12% alcohol content by volume), and 150 to 250 FCFA per plastic bag of whisky (30 to 50 ml of 42 to 45% alcohol content by volume) during the research period.
- (13) *Bela* in the Baka language simply means “labor” (Brisson, 2010).
- (14) The daily wage is negotiated between the employers and the employees in the study area. Large-scale farmers who employ many workers tend to provide additional incentives to the Baka to ensure they will have enough workers.
- (15) This man checks the cacao price every evening using international radio broadcasts from Europe during the high season.
- (16) The Muslim merchants of Yokadouma hired a Muslim “bush taxi” driver in Moloundou by providing an honorarium to find Baka laborers and bring them north. Similar Muslim networks facilitate to obtain the services of Baka migrant laborers. According to my interviews with those who have worked in the north, the owners of plantations feed them, give them clothes and other daily necessities, and pay them 150,000 FCFA for three Baka boys. The boys share the money and use it immediately before returning home.
- (17) The Baka in the study area have developed several forms of communal labor to help each other’s farming practice. According to the Baka elders, group work was first

introduced under the guidance of the local government to improve the Baka people's agricultural production. The Baka gradually adopted this practice both for food crop cultivation and for cacao cultivation.

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